

4 BENEFITS OF BREATH AWARENESS AND WHY PRACTICING IT MATTERS

PRACTICING CONSCIOUS BREATHING IS GOOD FOR YOU.

A person typically takes between 17,000 and 30,000 breaths per day, every day. Bring your attention to this normal occurrence for a few minutes daily for health benefits. And, pausing for a 2-minute breathing break is a great way to enjoy a quick refresher in the middle of a hectic day, especially if it's a work from home day.

Let's begin with a few definitions:

Conscious breathing or **'breath awareness'** practices simply means that you pay attention to your breath. You make no effort to control or change it.

'Coherent breathing' is an exercise where you consciously lengthen your breath and make your inhale and exhale (known as one breath cycle) approximately the same length. It's also referred to as paced breathing.

'Controlled breathing' exercises, also known as pranayama among yoga practitioners, involve varying the lengths of inhalations and exhalations by specific counts and may also include breath holding in between inhales and exhales.

Conscious breathing is easiest as it only requires observing the breath. It's a valuable practice, particularly if you're interested in meditation since it's an important meditation skill. It provides the following additional benefits:



Focus or concentrate attention.

With the ever-present challenge of digital distraction, improving our skill of attention—the ability to focus on a single subject—is important. Research shows that in the past 15 years, the average adult attention span has decreased from 12 seconds to 8 seconds, literally less than that of a goldfish! The breath is always with us and provides an easily accessible focal point for attention.

Cultivate present-moment or mindful awareness. When you pay attention to the breath, you're noticing what is happening in the moment. This helps you develop your skill of mindfulness, in other words, present-moment awareness. Our breath is alive. Observing the breath, immediately connects you to your living present moment experience. Increasing mindfulness is linked with many benefits including less stress and better life quality.



Enable conscious access to the nervous system.

For a quick review, our autonomic nervous system regulates physical processes that keep us alive. In other words, your heart beats, you breathe, your food is digested, automatically, when you're healthy. Breathing is one aspect of the nervous system that you can also consciously control by regulating your inhalation and exhalation. [In contrast, for example, it's very difficult to consciously affect your digestion, no matter how hard you think about it!] Often, when you observe the breath, it will slow down and create feelings of calm. A long, slow breath is characteristic of the 'rest and digest' phase of the nervous system, that contrasts with the 'fight or flight' phase.



Enhance your mind-body connection.

Your mind and body are intertwined. However, many of us often 'live in our thoughts'. This can lead to loss of a sense of connection with the body. For example, many lose sensitivity to more subtle sensations of fatigue, sleepiness, or thirst. Or people mask these natural feelings with caffeine. When you practice noticing the breath and bodily movements with inhalation and exhalation, it awakens your awareness to more subtle physical sensations and improves overall body awareness. Preliminary research suggests that body awareness helps with emotion regulation. Better emotion regulation means fewer emotional highs and lows, more overall feelings of calm.

You can see from review of these benefits that taking a few minutes out of each day to practice observing the breath is worthwhile. You can increase mindfulness, enhance calm feelings, improve emotional stability, and strengthen your ability to focus your attention.

Simply watch the video: We lead you through a simple exercise that you can do on your own to receive the benefits daily.

Click here to listen to the podcast or follow the instructions below:



EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF BREATH

We start by finding a comfortable sitting position with your spine straight. Sitting as tall and comfortably as possible. This could be on a chair, or on the floor.

Now draw your focus to your breathing without changing how you are breathing. Just notice how you are breathing.

Are you breathing fast or slowly?

Are you breathing high up in the chest, shallowly?

Notice if your chest expands as you breathe.

Notice if your tummy pulls in or pushes out as you breathe in.

Does your tongue sit at the bottom of your mouth or in the middle or on the roof of your mouth?

Observe how the breath feels for you right now. Does it feel easy or a bit more challenging?

We will now start to change the breath.

Explore breathing in and out through the nose.

See if you can keep the tongue resting on the roof of the mouth rather than on the bottom.

Feel the air coming in and out through the nose. Keep breathing as you observe this.

Draw your attention then to the chest and notice if the chest is expanding as you breathe in and soften back in when you breathe out. If not, then start to consciously do this. As your lungs fill with air and expand, the ribs must expand to allow the space for the filled lungs. As your lungs expand and fill, your diaphragm, the main 'breathing muscle' pushes down to allow space for the lungs and so the tummy needs to expand or push out as well.

Keep your breathing light, soft and deep. Close your eyes if you feel safe doing so. Keep breathing like this, very present on the moment and all the processes and thoughts and sensations, noticing the emotions that you may feel, for as long as you wish to.

1:2 RATIO

Use this breath when you are feeling anxious, nervous, over excited, or worried. It is useful to do when you can't sleep at night. It is a wonderful breath to use in anger management in both adults and children. Giving you time to pause, calm down and respond rather than react.

Breathe in through the nose, remembering to breath with the chest, the diaphragm, and the tummy. Exhale through the mouth through softly pursed lips, have the lips softly and slightly open as if breathing through a straw or gently blowing out a candle. The exhale should be twice as long as the inhale. So, if you breath in for 3 then breath out for a count of 6.

It is also useful in times of high emotion to bring your one hand to your heart as you breathe like this.

Do this any time in the day that you feel it could help you. Do it wherever you are, standing, sitting, lying down, in public or on your own. Try it in as many situations as you can to experience the effects. Notice how the breath has made you feel in the body and the mind.

SQUARE OR BOX BREATHING

As the name suggests, in this technique we breath in four equal parts.

Inhale, hold, exhale, hold.

Breathing in and out through the nose.

Start with a count of 3. Breathing for 3, hold for 3, exhale for 3 and hold for 3.

As you feel comfortable with a count of 3 increase it to 4 and then 5.

Be aware of any tension or effort around the breath hold. You have plenty of oxygen in your body to sustain a long hold just relax into it.

This breath is very calming and balances the nervous system.

Try to practice for up to 10 minutes a day!

BUMBLE BEE BREATH

This technique is a wonderful breath to include in a wellness program when recovering from Covid. It is also fantastic to use to build up resilience before you get Covid, due to the increased production of nitric oxide while humming.

Bumble bee breath is very effective for anxiety and can be used as soon as you feel the anxiety coming on or once anxious.

As we breathe in through our nose it produces nitric oxide which is anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-parasitic. While we hum that production spikes, making this the magic of bumble bee breath, especially in the recovery from and wellness protocol against covid.

In bumble bee breath we also use our hands to block off the sense of sight by placing the middle and index fingers gently over the eyes, and sound by pressing the thumbs softly next to the ears. This is very beneficial when we use bumble bee breath for anxiety.

As we always do, find a comfortable position, sitting, tall spine. On the exhale place the index and middle fingers over the eyes and press the thumbs in front of the ears. Breathe in through the nose and exhale with the sound M, a long hum until you need to take another inhale.

It is ideal to practice for up to 10 minutes a day.

If you are practicing this breath specifically for the humming benefits, you can also do it without blocking off the senses. If you are in a public space and need the calming effects of this breath find a secluded spot or a parked car in which to practice.